

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January, 2011

Agenda Item: "No Wake" boating restrictions on Tongue River Reservoir

Division: Law Enforcement

Action Needed: Approval of Tentative Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: **10 minutes**

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Background

Heavily visited Tongue River Reservoir State Park is located six miles north of Decker. Boating, fishing and other water sports are popular on this 12-mile long reservoir. With the high-use levels of motorized water craft on Tongue River Reservoir make water safety a major concern. Currently, all bays on the west side of Tongue River Reservoir are "no wake" speed areas, with the exception of Neck Bay which is no wake from shoreline to 300 feet from shoreline. Due to the geographic design of Neck Bay, at full pool and through the drawdown of the reservoir during irrigation, the 300 foot rule's 'boundaries' change and is often unclear as to where the rule is in effect. Wardens have issued citations for violations of the no wake zone but because of the difficulty to tell the precise location of the zone wardens generally give people warnings for violations. In 2009, a boating accident occurred when two boats collided in the no wake zone. Both boat operators were cited for careless boat operation. It is proposed to include the entire Neck Bay as a no wake speed area. This bay would be buoyed across the geographic entrance. This type of restriction would significantly lessen the confusion that watercraft operators are currently experiencing in attempting to comply with the ever-changing 300-foot-from-shore rule.

Public Involvement Process & Results

In February 2000, public meeting were held in Miles City, Billings and Sheridan, Wyoming. These meetings addressed the initial needs for "No Wake" zones and additional PWC restrictions on this reservoir. In general terms, the comments indicated the need for simplicity, visitor equipment protection, limiting interference with shore fisherman and establish bank integrity with the vacillating reservoir water levels. Recent on-site contacts show a common trend of visitor confusion in Neck Bay with the current rule, along with a high rate of non-compliance.

Alternatives and Analysis

An alternative is to not adjust the boundaries for no wake speed in Neck Bay, which would continue the confusion about the no wake speed boundaries in Neck Bay.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Make Neck Bay a no wake zone consistent with the other bays on the west side of Tongue River Reservoir. The change will alleviate the confusion that exists with the changing water levels and the current 300 feet from shore rule.

Proposed Motion

Require all motorized watercraft to travel at "no wake" speed in the entire geographic boundaries on Neck Bay on the west side of Tongue River Reservoir.